

Keepin' It Real:

Constructions of Whiteness and Expressions of Irishness in the
Dublin Hip-Hop Scene

by
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Declaration

I confirm that this thesis is entirely my own work and that it has never been submitted as an exercise for a degree in any other university. I agree that the library may lend or copy this thesis on request.

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Abstract

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The spread of hip-hop through the force of globalization has secured it as the dominant cultural force at the global level. Ian Condry has examined the impact of hip-hop in Japan and the ways in which Japanese hip-hop has been appropriated into Japanese culture, making space for this new cultural force while simultaneously becoming a valid expression of Japanese-ness. I begin by examining racial theories of whiteness and Irishness, how the Irish “became” white, historically speaking, and how Irishness is used similarly to minstrelsy blackface. Next I investigate current Irish notions of Irishness and Irish identity in the evolving homogeneous society of Dublin, and how issues of gender affect Irish hip-hop and Irish identity in the music and scene. Finally, I demonstrate how the changing face of Irish society is reflected in the music scene, that the heterogeneous Irish identity leads to similar musical identities, and my final argument that hip-hop is a more valid and up-to-date expression of Irishness due to the accessibility of hip-hop music across class lines.

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Introduction

A young rapper takes the stage in a small club as about 20 teenagers gather around the stage. "Get your hoods up!" he intones as he flips up the hood on his own sweatshirt and several youths in attendance obey his command. The DJ starts the music and the young MC, or microphone champ, then launches into a rap before arriving at the chorus: "Run amok! Run amok!" he chants as the teens in the audience jump up and down to the music. This club scene is not taking place in New York, Los Angeles, Detroit, Houston or even London. The club is the Lower Deck at Portobello Bridge on Dublin's southside. The MC Diligenz, an up-and-coming rhymer from Dublin's northside, and the phrase he chants, "run amok," is a popular Irish phrase meaning to go crazy. The song ends, the teens cheer and Diligenz hops off the stage and re-joins his friends at the back of the pub.

In Dublin and across Ireland, Irish youth are partaking in hip-hop, the African-American art form born out of poverty that has now taken over the world. Rap shows are held regularly across Ireland and local Irish rappers are releasing albums every year. While none have cracked the U.S. music market, a couple of artists have begun touring and performing in the U.S., and American rap artists tour and perform regularly across Ireland. Rap music scenes are to be found in almost every country and culture around the world. As rap is appropriated by yet another culture and similarities are adopted and new forms of expression are added to the musical form, the question begs: can rap be a legitimate form of self-expression for the Irish people?

This qualitative study seeks to examine hip-hop as a viable form of Irish self-expression while also analyzing issues of authenticity in the musical form. Issues of heterogeneity and globalisation also will be explored.

Chapter 1: Lit Review

No literature exists linking hip-hop, whiteness, and Irish identity. However, principle texts exist for each topic. A few key texts on hip-hop have been written during the last 20 years. Tricia Rose has written what can be termed as a definitive text on the early stages of hip-hop, "Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America." Published in 1994, the book covers the development of rap in its first 15 years, from 1979 to 1994, addressing the social conditions that produced it as well as the sonic, social, and lyrical issues in rap music. Rose also addresses the overall culture of hip-hop, breaking it down into four subsets consisting of deejaying, rhyming, dance, and graffiti (Rose, 1994: 45). My study will primarily focus on deejaying and rhyming; I will not cover graffiti or dance at all even though those elements exist quite strongly in Dublin.

"Hip-Hop Japan," published by Ian Condry in 2006, examines all aspects of Japanese hip-hop such as MCs, their relationship to their fans, and the globalization and localization of hip-hop. Condry observed that Japanese MCs have localized hip-hop through their incorporation of samurai imagery and katanas, samurai swords, into their lyrics and even as props when posing for photos (Condry, 2006: 49). One point I will address in my research is the extent to which Irish MCs incorporate symbols of Irish heritage, nationalism, or culture into their lyrics.

Whiteness only began emerging specifically as a topic about 10 years ago. While literature on whiteness is still in the formative stages, some strong texts have been produced. France Winddance Twine's article titled "Brown-Skinned White Girls: Class, Culture, and the Construction of White Identity in Suburban Communities," from Ruth Frankenberg's *Displacing Whiteness: Essays in Social and Cultural Criticism* is highly informative. Twine conducted interviews with young women of both African-American descent and either European-American or Asian descent who were students at the University of California-Berkeley (Twine, 1997: 214). Her interview subjects all had grown up in middle-class suburban communities and identified themselves as white prior to their college experiences (Twine, 1997: 215). After arriving at college the young women began to explore their racial identities as black women (Twine, 1997: 220). Twine discovered several characteristics of whiteness. Whiteness was constructed in her interview subjects as being racially neutral, that

is, race was rarely ever mentioned in their upbringing (Twine, 1997: 222). Racial differences such as skin color or hair texture were never mentioned among friends or pointed out in the community (Twine, 1997: 224). Class is also an important signifier (Twine, 1997: 226). Class, particularly middle-class as an economic position of privilege, was seen as more important than race especially in one's ability to purchase whatever they choose (Twine, 1997: 226).

Another point was that white identity was viewed as an expression and embodiment of individuality, that those who identified as white did not feel that they were responsible for representing their racial group (Twine, 1997: 227). And a final point was that whiteness allowed its members to express themselves fully in all situations without any need for self-censorship (Twine, 1997: 229). This was noticed in contrast to African-Americans, who stated they had been raised to exercise self-censorship when they are in the presence of strangers or those they are not as familiar with (Twine, 1997: 229). In his article "Establishing Whiteness," from 1997, John Hartigan Jr. wrote that a major feature of whiteness was the ability to maintain dominance and control resources (Hartigan, 1997: 496).

U2: An Irish Phenomenon takes a sociological look at the rock band U2, probing how the band identifies itself as Irish and how this is expressed in their music. Through interviews with the band as well as external observations as a non-Irish person, Cogan partially identifies Irishness as a tradition of story-telling exemplified by having "a gift of gab" and a "gift of writing" (Cogan, 2006: 48). Cogan also notes that U2 can be considered a folk band, despite the fact that they inarguably play rock music (Cogan, 2006: 57). As Cogan states: " 'Irishness' is therefore not only about words, attitudes and places but also about an atmosphere that is quite difficult to put into words or to explain. Irish legends are a potent reminder of the origins, even though we all know that they are legends" (Cogan, 2006: 59). Therefore, a distinction is in telling stories or fragments of stories that are set to music (Cogan, 2006: 59). From this perspective, it will be possible to see how Irishness is represented in hip-hop.

Irish qualities expressed through music are also referenced by F. St. John Lacy in his "Notes on Irish Music" published in 1890 through the proceedings of the *Proceedings of the Musical Association* published by Oxford University Press. St. John Lacy state that national identity and character can be expressed through music.

Very little is written about Irish hip-hop or Irishness and hip-hop music. This is presumably due in part to the lack of recorded Irish hip-hop that has been released by the mainstream recording industry. Quite a bit of material on Irish music exists, particularly in the rock context. Given the international success of Irish acts such as Van Morrison, U2, Thin Lizzy, The Cranberries, and Sinead O'Connor, to name but a few, this is hardly surprising.

Two articles mention Irishness and hip-hop, but only in insignificant ways. "Hybridity and National Musics: the Case of Irish Rock Music," by Noel McLaughlin and Martin McLoone which was first published in the journal *Popular Music* in 2000, discusses the notion of Irish identity expressed through a hybrid of Irish trad and rock music (McLaughlin, et al., 2000). The article also touches briefly on House of Pain, an early 1990s Irish-American rap group with some mainstream success, and the hostile critical response the band received as it played up and parodied components of its Irishness in their music (McLaughlin, et al., 2000).

The second article, " 'I Want Your Hands on Me': Building Equivalences Through Rap Music" by Katrina Irving and published in *Popular Music* in May 1993, analyzes a collaboration between Sinead O'Connor and MC Lyte, a female rapper from New York (Irving, 1993). However, the article addresses issues of gender representation and power rather than national identity expressed through music (Irving, 1993).

In terms of studies on European rap scenes, Andy Bennett has published "Hip Hop am Main, Rappin' on the Tyne: Hip Hop Culture as a Local Construct in Two European Cities," which focuses on rap scenes in Frankfurt, Germany and Newcastle, England (Bennett, 2000). Bennett focuses on the appropriation of hip-hop in predominantly white areas and the construction of identity through these music scenes.

Why White Kids Love Hip-Hop: Wankstas, Wiggers, Wannabes, and the New Reality of Race in America by Bakari Kitwana discusses the cultural appropriation of hip-hop by whites and the socio-economic changes in America that have brought this about (Kitwana, 2005).

Japanese appropriation of blues has been analyzed by Shuhei Hosokawa in "Blackening Japanese: Experiencing Otherness From Afar". Hosokawa notes how Japanese musicians

have appropriated blues and other African-American musical forms and their impact on Japanese culture (Hosokawa, 2002).

In terms of examining whiteness, a range of literature exists on the history of whiteness in the United States. Stuart Hall discusses the representation of the Other in *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, noting how the Other is portrayed through wildly exaggerated stereotypes (Hall, 1997). Roediger discusses the evolution of the white race in 'Whiteness and Ethnicity in the History of "White Ethnics" in the United States'.

This concludes my section on methodology. I will discuss the theory of whiteness in the next section.

Chapter 2: Methodology

This section discusses the research methodologies I used to organize my research and collect the data. I proposed to undergo an observer-as-participant ethnography that would primarily capture the thoughts, impressions and experiences of performers, promoters, record store owners, radio DJs and other scenesters, individuals involved in the culture as well as the local scene, as well as fans I encountered at shows. My interview subjects were selected at random, people involved in the scene who would grant me access. Often times one interview would lead to a contact for another interview.

My study was designed as an observer-as-participant ethnography (Bryman, 2004) because I was acting as an interviewer but was also engaging in social rituals germane to the scene, such as particular types of handshakes or dancing. The concern regarding “going native” (ibid) was a moot one because although I did begin to have repeated interactions with a few individuals the amount of interaction during the entire course of my study was so low as to not substantially reduce any boundaries.

Preparation & Planning

As Fielding states, ethnographies should include observations that occur in the subject’s natural setting (Fielding, 2001). Therefore I planned to attend as many live hip-hop gigs as possible held at night clubs in Dublin over a two-month period, during June and July, ultimately a total of 12 gigs. I also determined that this would be an overt study (Fielding, 2001) for the reason that it was not necessary to conceal my identity as an academic researcher. I presumed that openness about my study would increase interest and participation from the subjects, as it was the first study of its kind focusing on Irish hip-hop. This did seem to be the case among some participants.

This being a qualitative study I wanted to capture the thoughts and opinions of both musicians and fans. As Bryman has noted, open questioning is often the best way to achieve this (2004). Therefore, I devised a questionnaire that would allow the subjects to answer in their own words and manners, and allowed them to cover or introduce any new topics if they so desired (2004). The drawbacks to this approach as outlined by Bryman included being time consuming for myself and the subject, the need for coding the answers in order to process the

data, as well as putting a slight burden on the subject to answer the questions (2004).

Recording the data was not a problem as I used a laptop and I possess quite a proficient typing speed as well as the ability to type answers while engaging with the subject (2004).

Frith and Savage note how easily research and journalism can overlap one another (1998). In order to avoid this pitfall I frequently referenced my research question, "Is Irish identity expressed through hip-hop and is Irish hip-hop authentic?" This ensured that I retained my focus throughout my study and that I was collecting data to further this end.

Questionnaires

The goal of the questionnaire was to capture the subjects' thoughts on hip-hop, Irishness and how the two intersected. The questionnaire originally contained 13 questions. During the course of circulating the questionnaire at 3 gigs one question was added, and another eventually dropped. The survey began asking general questions about hip-hop as well as general questions about Irish traits. Then the line of questioning focused on Irish hip-hop and American hip-hop, and concluded on questions of representing Irishness in Irish hip-hop. The questionnaire initially did not inquire as to the nationality of the respondent, but as to whether the respondent identified with particular Irish traits. Once it became clear that non-Irish people could identify with Irish traits a question was added inquiring about the individual's country of origin. This was important in order to determine who was answering the questionnaire. While the individual's nationality would not eliminate their answer from the research it was deemed necessary to know who was answering the questions. Ultimately it was necessary to know whether the vast majority of answers on Irishness and Irish hip-hop were being supplied by Irish and were not just the opinions of outsiders. A study on Irish people should have information supplied by Irish people themselves, and not be largely based upon the opinions of non-Irish observers.

I designed my questionnaire with my respondents, namely clubgoers, in mind (Simmons, 2001). Leading questions were avoided as I wanted to capture my subjects' impressions while exerting as little influence as possible (Simmons, 2001). I also sought to organize the direction and flow of the questionnaire by starting with general questions about hip-hop music

and Irishness and ending with questions about the authenticity of Irish hip-hop. This was done in an attempt to build the information slowly in a pointed direction.

The questionnaire was predominantly distributed at gigs of Irish rappers as well as at shows of non-Irish musicians, namely big-name American rappers. I approached any and all individuals; race, gender, and appearance, namely their style of dress, were not used in any way as discriminating factors either positively or negatively. I strove for a minimum of 10 respondents at each show. One factor that arose was how to get the individual to respond to the questionnaire. Having the subjects answer the survey on the spot typically yielded a high number of questionnaires, but the answers were not often very illustrative. This was due to a number of factors including their possible level of intoxication, whether or not they took the survey seriously, the distractions present, and whether they were able to provide well-thought out answers on the spot. Many individuals, both in interviews as well as in online comments, noted that the questionnaire required a good degree of thought. Therefore, about midway through my data-gathering I changed my methodology and began giving individuals the choice of filling out the questionnaire in the club or allowing me to email it to them and they could fill it out and email it back to me. This presented a different dilemma, in that the answers emailed back were often very contemplative and yielded good data, but the number of questionnaires returned was often very low. Bryman states that one of the disadvantages of open questioning is that the amount of time required to fill out a questionnaire can often discourage participation (2004). Whether or not this was the case is unknown, but the questions did require a bit of thought, so this may have been a factor.

I also posted the questionnaire online at [surveymonkey.com](https://www.surveymonkey.com) where I was able to direct subjects to fill out the survey. The Irish hip-hop community is very well connected via the Internet. The webpage irishhiphop.com is very well-trafficked and serves as a major meeting point as well as dissemination of information for the hip-hop community throughout Ireland. I added the survey link to one of the discussions with a brief explainer. This also yielded a high number of returned surveys, but again, the issue centered on the quality of answers provided. Another drawback of this method also was the inability to track the respondents as they answered each question. The surveymonkey.com site did not provide a way to follow a

respondent's answers throughout the survey. Therefore, if a subject skipped a question there would be no way to determine which other answers were theirs. This only became an issue when a couple of rappers I had hoped to interview filled out the survey online rather than via email or a face-to-face chat. Also, I tended to put a higher value on the answers provided by the rappers and scenesters than the audience members for the fact that the rappers and scenesters would have a higher level of commitment to the scene and music than the audience might.

Ethics

Bulmer notes that the chief ethical concerns in social research are the right of consent, respecting privacy and offering confidentiality (Bulmer, 2001). All of the questionnaires distributed to audience members at shows were designed to be answered anonymously. I explained my study to each person and told them that their answers would not be attributed to them. Although I requested that emails be provided for follow-ups, I assured them that they were not required to provide such information. Interviews were conducted on the record and I explained to the subjects that the answers would be attributed to them in full. However, occasionally I was told sensitive information about specific rappers that I chose not to disclose so as not to embarrass them and not to lose the subjects as sources. I also did not want to anger the community as a whole and risk losing the access that I was obtaining. Each interviewee signed a consent form that acknowledged they understood the goals of my research and that their views would be attributed to them. These were signed before the interviews started to ensure that I would be able to use all of the information which they provided. I was also careful not to share information between respondents unless I had been told that I could do so.

Conducting Interviews

Interviews with rappers, DJs, promoters, record store owners, and other scenesters was a big component of the data-gathering process. I chose semi-structured interviews over structured interviews because I was putting a large emphasis on the thoughts and feelings behind the information being supplied. The interviews were conducted wherever possible and under any conditions, either at the gigs or at a mutually agreed upon location. Again, both choices had negatives and positives. Conducting interviews at gigs could be difficult due to the fact that

the artists were either getting ready to perform or had just complete a performance, and therefore might be distracted during the interview. The other consideration was that it might be more difficult for them to focus on providing thoughtful answers at a club due to the loud music, alcohol consumption, attraction from the opposite sex, watching other performers, and also being the center of attention. However, interviewing them on the spot also meant that they were available and that I would not have to risk the possibility of not catching up with them at a later date, as this proved to be the case with a handful of subjects. When possible, finding a quiet and comfortable location with as much time available as possible proved to be the best method to conduct the interview, allowing the artist to focus on the questions posed to them. Although Bennett notes that interviews conducted outside of the club lose value due to the lack of atmosphere of the space (2003), I found that interviews conducted outside of the club actually provided more value because the subjects could focus on the questions being asked and were not distracted by the happenings in the club.

I provided the artist with a copy of the questions, and when possible, I emailed them in advance or described the nature of the questions so that they could reflect and prepare their answers. Also, the value of using a keyboard vs. writing down their answers was weighed. While it was a bit of a liability to carry a laptop with me and search for power sources in clubs, the keyboard allowed me to take more detailed answers at a faster rate. The artists seemed to be able to speak more freely when I was typing their answers rather than if I was writing them down, probably because they did not have to wait for me to catch up to them.

Also, the interviews were conducted in a semi-structured style in that some answers lead to other questions that were not scripted or that provided more in-depth questions. This proved useful in acquiring in-depth information. In some cases a personal rapport was struck with the interview subject. I did not downplay or discourage this as I felt it might be useful in getting the subject to speak more freely; however, I did not intentionally seek to create this either. I also was mindful of the amount of time being spent so as not to either inconvenience the subject or lead to some answers being cut short due to time. When possible I offered to buy them a beverage or I would offer to do small favors as a way of thanking for them for their time and to build a rapport. I was always mindful of building the relationship and that it might yield other

contacts down the line. For instance, I would occasionally burn CDs or provide the name of a club or promoter in order to assist a rapper in getting more gigs.

Attending Gigs

Appearance, namely the clothes I wore to each gig, was a major consideration. I deliberately chose my outfit for each gig based on the need to fit in and appear somewhat in touch with the audience and subjects I was striving to connect with. I always dressed basically as "myself", meaning that the clothes I wore were natural selections from my existing wardrobe that I would have worn if I was going out anyway. I made no effort to specifically purchase any clothes that were "hip-hop" styled in a need to fit in or appear as part of the scene. On the other hand, I did not want to overdress for each occasion and thereby appear too out of touch to lose the confidence of those I was researching.

Practicing rituals was also a consideration. I was often greeted with "jive" handshakes, particularly as I gained more recognition within the scene. These types of greetings were familiar to me as I had often practiced them with friends back home as a normal part of our greetings and interactions. Therefore, demonstrating this form of "insider knowledge" came naturally to me. It was also the first time in 10 months of living in Ireland that I had encountered anyone who practiced these types of greetings. Whether or not this gave me more credibility to my subjects was not known.

Demonstrating a knowledge of hip-hop music at large was important in order to establish a certain amount of equality with those in the scene. I never deliberately sought to overstep my own bounds as a fan, in that I consciously made decisions not to talk about artists or movements within the music that I knew nothing about. Any kind of misstep such as that would certainly cost me any credibility as a source and someone in whom the subjects could confide. My interest in and knowledge of hip-hop music as a whole gave me a bit of knowledge that I could use to relate to artists, which was useful at times in conversations with bands and performers, particularly in club settings, as I established that we could relate to each other as music fans.

I demonstrated Irish slang as it came naturally to me as a resident of Ireland for 10 months. No specific decision was made to bolster my speech with slang in order to make friends or impress subjects on my assimilation into Irish culture. Rather, I spoke no differently than with any of my other Irish friends, and at times only made considerations as to curtail any excessive use of slang so as not to appear as an Irish-wannabe or as being inauthentic. For example, my conversation with P the Emcee of The Gudmen covered the difficulty of appropriating slang from one culture to another, and how Irish and Americans can sound inauthentic using slang from both cultures when taken out of context or used inappropriately.

Bennett also raises the issue of age differences/similarities between the researcher and the subjects (2003). The average age of my subjects fluctuated between 20 and 30, and I am currently 35. However, this did not seem to affect my ability to interact and gain their trust, partially because I do not look my age and also due to my connection to the material. Sometimes the subjects told me their ages, unprompted by myself; other times their age was available on their website or profile page.

Following Bryman's guidelines on field notes, I used a composite of mental, jotted and full field notes (2004). My field notes were usually hand written in brief notes on the back of a questionnaire in the club after I had been there for about an hour. When I got home I typically wrote a long narrative about the evening incorporating everything that I had seen. My observations were built around a series of questions that I used for every gig.

Analyzing Data

After I finished the survey and interview portion of my study I began coding the questionnaires. As stated by Bryman, coding is necessary for organizing data. Due to the qualitative nature of this study and the fact that I was seeking open answers to my questions, pre-coding was eschewed in favour of post-coding (Bryman 2004). For post-coding initially I discarded any questionnaires that were incomplete or offered very sparse answers. After getting a general feel for the variety of answers I sorted through the questionnaires looking for the most expressive answers as well as a variety of answers. I kept the questionnaires sorted by those collected online and those collected at shows. For the questionnaires collected at shows I organized them according to the show at which they were collected. I determined that some

portion of each interview would be used if possible, but due to the overlapping answers of the surveys, only the most thought-out answers would be used. This was due to the fact that the questions tended to generate a range of answers. Also, some respondents were more thoughtful and expressive in their answers, which I deemed to have more value than the brief responses.

Relations of Power

Fielding notes that objectivity is impossible to achieve in an ethnography as ultimately the findings are all influenced by the researcher's own predispositions via the concept of relativism (Fielding, 2001). "The ethnographer is never a detached observer: our view is inescapably relative to our own perspective. 'Objective' observation is hopeless to achieve." (Fielding, 2001: 155). In order to address this I simply used the same set of criteria for assessing each show and performance. I also made sure to have each interviewee explain any answers that might be left open to interpretation. For example, hip-hop promoter Tom O'Connor told me that his first connection to hip-hop music was that he related to the lyrics. He then described his poor upbringing and the desire to overcome it, common themes found in American hip-hop music.

Morley notes that the modern media ethnographer needs to define his own place in the ethnography prior to starting the work (2005). As my research began I noted the differences and the similarities between myself and my subjects, and these became more apparent as the work bore on. In many cases, the differences included that I was not the same nationality, typically had a higher level of education, was usually from a more privileged background, and that my interest in hip-hop music and hip-hop culture was not as strong or as intense as my subjects'. The Dublin scene is predominantly male and about 60 percent white, of which I am both. The dominant majority of the subjects that I interviewed were male and white. Only 2 of the 17 individuals that I interviewed were female; only 3 of the subjects were black. I Although I reached out to an equal number of subjects from all ethnic and national backgrounds, the predominant responses were from the native Irish. I also pursued a number of women roughly half the number of men, due to the relative scarcity of women participating in the Dublin scene, but ultimately only two of these responded.

A final consideration was how to position the voices of my subjects in my final research. Morley notes that the researcher occupies a position of power over the subjects because it is the researcher who selects what information to use and how to use it (2005). Therefore, I became cautious not to take responses out of context in an effort to prove my points regardless of how the participants' comments were made. I also strove to ensure that my recollections and reportings of gigs were as factual as possible. This was achieved by writing down the events as quickly as possible and using the same factors/questions to evaluate each gig.

In this section I detailed the type of study I sought to undertake, the specific methods I used for gathering data, the ethical issues I encountered, how I evaluated my own place in the study, and how I analyzed the data. In the next chapter, I will discuss the connection between whiteness, Irishness and the minstrel tradition.

Chapter 3: Whiteness, Irishness & Minstrelsy

This section discusses the concept of race and the development of whiteness in the United States and its role in the idea of race. Key characteristics of whiteness are analyzed as well as minstrelsy blackface and the use of Irishness as a form of blackface. The key point is that the notion of Irishness even in current times is located somewhere between whiteness and blackness.

Concepts of Race

Omi and Winnant define race as “a concept which signifies and symbolizes social conflicts and interests by referring to different types of human bodies” (Omi et al., 2002: 123). Aside from gender, “there is no biological basis for distinguishing among human groups” (Omi et al., 2002: 123); therefore, “race is a matter of both social structure and cultural representation” (Omi et al., 2002: 125).

Within the concept of race, whiteness is a social construct that is not about biological differences, but about the cultural meanings and social constructions that are often but not always associated with skin difference (Bhattacharyya, 2002: 26). A key tenet of Whiteness is that it has thrived on its ability to remain ethnically unmarked (Bhattacharyya, 2002: 10), and therefore offers the opportunity for various different ethnics to ‘become’ white that might traditionally might not be considered white (Goldberg, 2002: 179). But as it allows some to remain unmarked, it marks and racialises others, often exacerbating the fear of Others and the threats that they pose to whites (Frankenberg, 1997). As the anthropologist John Hartigan Jr. has noted, whiteness is considered the normative stance, the bar to which all other races and ethnicities are held and judged. (Hartigan, 1997: 496). Therefore, as the racial state seeks to maintain an “us and them” stance, whiteness becomes necessary both for promoting homogeneity and the essentialism of others.

A Historical View of Whiteness

The United States was predominantly founded by British settlers, thereby marking the racial make-up as mostly white with the addition of enslaved Africans. When the first Congress met in 1790, one of the requirements for citizenship was being “white”, though the term was not used at the time; alternately the terms Caucasian and Aryan were used (Roediger, 2002: 325).

As the U.S. began experiencing heavy waves of immigration in the 1800s and continuing into the twentieth century, the question arose: what constitutes whiteness, or, perhaps more succinctly, who is white? Even in 1907, the answer to this question was unclear as United States Attorney at San Francisco Robert T. Devlin said: "There is considerable uncertainty as to just what nationalities come within the term 'white person'" (Roediger, 2002: 325). Even by this period, many court cases had been held, and even more would go to trial, to determine who qualified as white in the eyes of the law.

In the late 1800s, the strong waves of immigration that came to the U.S. brought a heterogeneity that had previously not been seen (Roediger, 2002: 335). Therefore, a return to homogeneity was a needed antidote, a way to return power to one group and maintain order within the racial state (Goldberg, 2002: 188).

In some cases, immigrants based their identities in whiteness but added elements from various sources, such as from African-American culture as well as their own ethnicity. As a result, whiteness prevailed in the U.S. as the dominant ethnicity while at the same time being changed from within. Roediger cites the examples of jazz musician Louis Prima and rhythm and blues musician Johnny Otis, Italian and Greek immigrants, respectively, who consciously chose to follow the musical elements of African-American culture rather than the musical elements of their own immigrant cultures (Roediger, 2002: 334). In this way, both men selectively chose and eschewed elements of whiteness as well as blackness. This aspect of whiteness, the conscious decision to choose to be white, opens up a new area, in that the individual can move between whiteness and other identities as it suits them.

As Roediger states, for many immigrants choosing whiteness was the lesser of two evils when faced with assimilating into whiteness, and therefore attaining certain status and privileges not available as non-members, or remaining as non-white but facing similar oppressions as blacks (Roediger, 2002: 337). In examining the case of the Irish, Ignatiev outlines that whiteness was a conscious choice made by Irish immigrants (Ignatiev, 1995) because "while the white skin made the Irish eligible for membership in the white race, it did not guarantee their admission; they had to earn it" (Ignatiev, 1995: 59). Therefore, the Irish

competed against the African-Americans for the same jobs and then eliminated the memory that those same jobs had at one time been held by the African-Americans (Ignatiev, 1995).

Key Characteristics of Whiteness

Whiteness is comprised of several traits and characteristics as well as conditions, and France Winddance Twine has identified several prominent traits of whiteness. Twine conducted interviews with young women of both African-American descent and either European-American or Asian descent who were students at the University of California-Berkeley (Twine, 1997: 214). Her interview subjects all had grown up in middle-class suburban communities and identified themselves as white prior to their college experiences (Twine, 1997: 215). After arriving at college the young women began to explore their racial identities as black women (Twine, 1997: 220). Twine discovered several characteristics of whiteness. Whiteness was constructed in her interview subjects as being racially neutral, that is, race was rarely ever mentioned in their upbringing (Twine, 1997: 222). Racial differences such as skin color or hair texture were never mentioned among friends or pointed out in the community (Twine, 1997: 224). Class is also an important signifier (Twine, 1997: 226). Class, particularly middle-class as an economic position of privilege, was seen as more important than race, especially in one's ability to purchase whatever they choose (Twine, 1997: 226).

Another point was that white identity was viewed as an expression and embodiment of individuality, that those who identified as white did not feel that they were responsible for representing their racial group (Twine, 1997: 227). Life choices, such as decisions of who to date, the level of education to pursue, selection of jobs or careers, were not considered political decisions or reflective representation of the greater group. There was no pressure to maintain certain standards or fulfill expectations or obligations from the group-at-large.

Whiteness also allows its members to express themselves fully in all situations without any need for self-censorship (Twine, 1997: 229). This was noticed in contrast to African-Americans, who stated they had been raised to exercise self-censorship when they are in the presence of strangers or those with whom they are not as familiar (Twine, 1997: 229). One of the respondents noted that she did not feel comfortable around her white mother pointing out shortcomings of other white women the way this young woman might around her friends.

Control of resources and maintaining dominance is also a major feature of whiteness (Hartigan, 1997: 496). Whiteness is not only marked by specific indicators defining its traits; it is also marked by the social conditions it produces. According to Bhattacharyya, "the psychological basis of whiteness has been attributed to deep-seated insecurities, anxieties and fears which are then expressed in numerous, neurosis-driven expressions of whiteness" (Bhattacharyya, et al., 2002: 25). However, these fears and anxieties are not just limited to whites, they are spread across realms of society to non-whites also (Bhattacharyya, et al., 2002: 25). bell hooks asserts that fear is a major component of race relations, as whites fear the other and as blacks are terrorized by whites (hooks, 1995: 37). hooks relates that feelings of safety as a child came only when in the absence of whites, and the importance of being aware of these feelings of fear that whiteness instilled in her (hooks, 1995: 45). But the fear is shared by both groups, she notes, as she states that "one fantasy of whiteness is that the threatening Other is always a terrorist" (hooks, 1995: 44).

Connotations of Whiteness

The real power in whiteness is in its ability to bestow values on whites and Others. According to Goldberg, whiteness represents light and learning, and blackness represents darkness and degeneration (Goldberg, 1997). Visibility is represented through whiteness and invisibility is represented through blackness; therefore, invisibility, or blackness "connotes absence, lack, incapacity, in short, powerlessness" (Goldberg, 1997: 80). As Goldberg states, "Race hides those it is projected to mask and illuminates those it leaves unmarked" (Goldberg, 1997: 80). But whiteness does not operate in a vacuum; it requires the participation of the Other, without which there would be no power. "Whites necessarily depend for their racial power on being recognized as white by the Other defined in racial terms precisely as black" (Goldberg, 1997: 83). This recognition by the Other "presupposes the Other's existence though not the Other's equality" (Goldberg, 1997: 81).

Representations of the Other

Difference, or "the fascination with 'otherness'" (Hall, 1997: 234), is essential in creating meaning. However, there are both negative and positive reasons for focusing on difference; these reasons illustrate why difference is "both necessary and dangerous" (Hall, 1997: 234). The first two meanings are based in linguistics, that meaning cannot be constructed without

difference because opposites supply meaning to each other through contrast (Hall, 1997: 234). Difference is necessary, the second argument goes, because meaning can only be constructed through a dialogue with the Other (Hall, 1997: 235). However, this also “underscores the fact that meaning cannot be fixed and that a single group can never be in charge of meaning” (Hall, 1997: 236). The third argument rests on the fact that “culture depends on giving things meaning by assigning them to different positions within a classificatory system” (Hall, 1997: 236); thus “the marking of difference is the basis of that symbolic order which we call culture” (Hall, 1997: 236). Hall’s last argument is that “the Other is fundamental to the constitution of the self, to us as subjects, and to sexual identity” (Hall, 1997: 237).

The way the Others is represented in society signifies and demonstrates the location of the other. Society is represented in its images and media portrayals; therefore those negative images are exaggerated and repeated over and over. According to Stuart Hall, stereotyping essentialises the ‘other’, reducing them to a small number of qualities, usually exaggerated traits, that ultimately fixes them with the mark of difference (Hall, 1997: 257). Any traits of the individual that do not fit these stereotypes are then discarded (Hall, 1997: 258). However, these stereotypes are essential for maintaining social order within the racial state as they are necessary for maintaining the “gross inequalities of power” that exist within them (Hall, 1997: 258).

As Hall notes, a frequent side effect of stereotypes is that the ‘other’ being stereotyped tends to shape their conduct to fit the stereotype or they grossly exaggerate their portrayal to reflect a caricature of the opposite (Hall, 1997: 263). For example, black men were often portrayed as childish, eventually leading to black men to act in an exaggerated machismo fashion, as they rebelled against the stereotype to the extreme (Hall, 1997: 263). These stereotypes help to foster and continue the sense of ‘Other’ and fear that accompanies them. Blacks and Irish are both often assigned exaggerated characteristics and traits, even if those traits are not the same.

Blackface Minstrelsy & Irishness

The manner in which black stereotypes have been inflated and used as caricatures is similar to the notion of "Irishness." During the Victorian era "Irish music...was constructed as a specific ethnic category based on the assumption that there was an identifiably Irish musical style that existed as an expression of the people, a reflection of their innate feelings and sensibilities. Music, therefore, became a feature of "race", taking on properties for the colonizer that appeared to transcend the passage of time, that remained fixed and unchanging" (McLaughlin et al., 2000: 181). Although these notions of Irishness in music were created and identified "from the outside, they have now become internalized and today bear traces of particular nationalist political and cultural history (ibid). But in the current global discourse of popular music, however, there is a "need to mark difference that might also require the strategic mobilization of aspects of this "Irishness" precisely to identify and mark out a space in the global "noise" where the experience of being peripheral might be articulated" (McLaughlin et al., 2000: 182).

The use of Irishness is similar to blackface minstrelsy, the practice of white musicians and performers to blacken their faces with greasepaint to appear as African-Americans. As Osborne states, "blackface minstrelsy is the gross caricature of black people that involved the creation of an "other" that brought confidence to the white audience" (Osborne, 2006: 16). The practice, "for the minstrel, is a marker of both difference and identification" (Osborne, 2006: 19). Irishness, then, like blackface minstrelsy, is an identity that can be taken off and put back on again at will as it suits the needs of the wearer to either arbitrarily stand out or blend in. But as McLaughlin states, global capitalism works "not by homogenizing world culture, but through niche marketing and the marketing of difference" (McLaughlin et al., 2000: 183).

Blackface is a form of racial "crossing over," a practice in which individuals take on the traits of other races (Roediger, 2002). Perhaps the most famous examples of crossing over are Elvis, Janis Joplin and Eminem; more common examples include "wiggers", the racial/racist term given to whites accused of "acting" black in terms of clothing, speech and musical tastes (Roediger, 2002). Elvis set a precedent more commonly followed: he began as a white man, "crossed over" into blackness when he began his career in his twenties, then headed back

toward whiteness while still holding onto some of the traits he acquired from blackness. Racial crossovers, particularly with regard to the Irish practice of doing so, will be discussed in more detail in the findings section.

According to Wellman, minstrelsy was not about race, but rather about the way whites “could appropriate and use elements of black life to negotiate problems posed by the larger society” (Wellman, 1997: 312). Minstrelsy allowed “white, heterosexual, male American identities to be fashioned and expressed” (Wellman, 1997: 312), while at the same time that minstrelsy “soothed white anxieties, [it] reassured white men who they were not: not black, not slave, not gay” (Wellman, 1997: 312).

According to Kitwana, hip-hop in America has become the new form of blackface minstrelsy (Kitwana, 2005). Kitwana quotes Melvin Donaldson, an African-American author, that hip-hop provides white youths with a “guise they can put on and take off at will” (Kitwana, 2005: 148).

“With blackface you can take it off. White hip-hop kids can turn their caps around, put a belt in their pants and go to the mall without being followed. Black people have to deal with oppression, but also character types that the hip-hop industry has created with the music by continuing the thug and gangsta stereotypes about Blacks. White hip-hop kids can pick and choose without repercussions and the full weight of racial stereotypes” (Kitwana, 2005: 148).

Irishness therefore straddles the line between whiteness and blackness in that the Irish have gained their place in the white race yet their characteristics of Irishness are exaggerated caricatures, similar to black stereotypes, that are allowed to be played up for their own use and advantage in order to display the mark of difference when needed. Members of the Irish race are able to cross back and forth into whiteness and Irishness as needed. This is due primarily to their position as both members of an oppressed race during British occupation as well as members of the dominant “white” race. This ability to cross over at will allows them to be both visible and invisible when needed.

This section discussed how European races including the Irish became white after arriving in the U.S. as a result of a conscious decision to “become” white, and how Irishness functions

as a form of blackface minstrelsy. The next section will discuss authenticity in relation to musical forms.

Chapter 4: Authenticity in Music Forms

The issue of authenticity in music is a complex one. At once, multiple issues exist. Is the music authentic when compared to its source, ie American rap? Are the issues and lyrical content authentic when looked at from the point of view of the rapper? Often times these issues exist in conflict with one another.

Authenticity is frequently the expression of a viewpoint, either that of the author or that of the consumer of the product. The author can produce a product that is authentic from the insider's point of view, but not necessarily from the consumer/outsider's point of view. Conversely, the product can be authentic from the viewpoint of the audience or consumer, the outsiders, but not necessarily from the author's or insider's viewpoint.

Rap Music

The hallmarks of rap music are spoken, rhyming lyrics delivered over a rhythmic pastiche that often incorporates musical samples of pre-recorded songs, typically those that are well-known. Rap originally consisted of an MC delivering his lyrics over a rhythmic backbeat provided by a DJ. The question of rap's musical authenticity is an oft-discussed issue. Critics usually cite the lack of formal musical training of the majority of rap musicians and producers as well as the heavy reliance on sampling as evidence of rap not being "real" music. But musical training alone should not determine the quality or validity of the music. As Simon Frith notes pop music is deemed to possess less "cultural" value than classical music (1992). However, this is a fallacy. Both musical styles have equal cultural value, but the approaches to playing them are different (Frith, 1992). Whereas classical requires formal training with lessons and often in academic settings such as in conservatories, pop music training typically takes the form of learning by ear and often with friends in informal settings (Frith, 1992). A large majority of popular artists whose music has received the highest of standards have received little to none in terms of formal training. Very few rock musicians can read music despite possessing extremely high levels of proficiency on their instruments or have formal training; a select few have undertaken to learn formal music skills late in their careers. This list includes such luminaries as guitarists Eric Clapton, Keith Richards, Jimmy Page, and Rush bassist Geddy Lee.

Therefore the amount of formal music training that one receives is rather trivial, as innate musical skills are already present in an individual and are cultivated rather than taught. Historically, there have been jazz musicians without formal training who have been held in high regard both as performers and composers, such as Thelonius Monk (Rose, 1994), although this is somewhat of a displaced argument, since Monk played an instrument and many rap DJs do not. But if music is about sounds, rules do not always need to be followed in order to make music that sounds good. Perry describes rap's intertextuality of sampling as a "conversation with the black musical tradition" in that music from one era and generation is brought forth into another era by a new generation, via sampling, who puts their stamp on the music (Perry, 2005: 34). In this way, the sampling is similar to the notion of call and response from blues and jazz music. Although rap vocals and rhymes are often essentialised as just speaking over music, Perry notes that the rapper's ability to improvise lyrics on the spot, better known as freestyling, is akin to the improvisational abilities of both blues and jazz musicians (Perry, 2005), skills that are the hallmarks of both musical styles.

As rap has gained acceptance around the globe as a cultural phenomenon it has spread into many cultures that have put their own stamp on it. Condry states that Japanese rap fans judged authenticity in Japanese rap from more of a musical perspective than a lyrical perspective (2006). Japanese rap fans put a higher premium on whether the music met certain criteria, such as the rapper's lyrical flow and the beats than the lyrical content. Therefore, rappers that had strong lyrical flow and delivery were considered authentic despite the fact that their lyrical content and topics may have been more in line with American subject matter, such as guns and drugs (Condry, 2006). Also, rappers with strong lyrical flow and delivery were deemed more authentic than those whose musical talents were not as strong but lyrically represented a more authentic Japanese identity through samurai imagery. The issue of samurai imagery in lyrics is also mildly controversial as it addresses the issue of Japanese identity vs. Western stereotypes of Japanese identity (Condry, 2006).

This issue is similar to one faced by Irish rappers. Redzer, an Irish rapper from the Dublin suburb of Coolock, discussed the issue of authenticity particularly in terms of having to meet external stereotypes of Irish culture. With regard to lyrics, he noted that Irish rappers are

discussing everyday, real life issues that occur in any wealthy, industrialized, Western (European) nation as opposed to stereotypical and essentialized views of Ireland that have very little to do with daily experience (2007). Many of the topics that rappers cover include relationships, life in poor working class neighbourhoods, and economic outlook, among others. "It's not like we're rapping about leprechauns," he said.

Eithne Quinn's studies on black gangsta rap raise issues of representational burdens as well as the authenticity of the gangsta rap form (Quinn, 2000). Quinn notes that despite the early criticism levied at gangsta rap for its harsh depictions and celebration of gun violence, drug consumption and trafficking, and its typical misogynistic stance, gangsta rap was also understood by critics as "experiential rather than formal, construing gangsta as social realism (reflecting the grim realities of the so-called black experience)" (Quinn, 2000: 196). Gangsta rap shares some similarities with Irish culture and Irish rap in its depictions of life for the lower class and working poor. While the gun culture of gangsta rap does not easily translate into Irish society due to the lack of a gun culture, the lack of easily attainable weapons, and the low rate of gun crimes as compared to the ghettos of the United States, gangsta rap's commentaries on dead-end jobs, poor economic outlook, bad attitudes toward women, and a poor outlook on life in general make for a good fit in Irish society.

Japanese appropriations of blues is another important example to look at when examining the Irish appropriation of hip-hop. When a cultural form is appropriated by a group of people a number of changes occur. One is the issue of mimicry (Bhabha, 1994). As Hosokawa states in summing up Bhabha, mimicry is a key process by which a cultural form is transferred from one place and person to another, and by which the boundaries between the original and the copy, the desired object and the mimicking subject, are blurred (Bhabha, 1994) (Hosokawa, 2002: 223). The original form becomes the blueprint, even if some aspects of the art form do not translate into the new culture. Respect, an important factor in African-American culture that connotes positive attributes, actually expresses "an empty moral" in Japanese (Hosokawa, 2002: 230). Therefore, new elements are introduced into a society while at the same time elements of the art form are changed to meet societal standards. Another example noted Hosokawa is that the Japanese language does not lend itself easily to rhyming, and

that MCs began a major undertaking when they started to write rhyming raps in Japanese (2002).

Although Japan is a country and society in which the concept of race is not important but the concept of nation is (Hosokawa, 2002), the Japanese have viewed foreign musical styles through the racial lens. As jazz was gaining in popularity in the 1950s, jazz played by black musicians was seen as more authentic than jazz played by whites (Hosokawa, 2002).

Hosokawa also states that "rock is regarded as "white" music, or as music unmarked by the concept of race" (2002: 227). Therefore, "it is blackness, not whiteness, that matters to Japanese musicians" (2002: 227).

Japan shares many similarities with Ireland in that it is traditionally an ethnically and culturally homogenous society. Just as some African-American rap terminology does not translate easily into Japanese, has the same cultural references in Japanese, or is even used in Japan, not all of it translates easily into Irish society either.

Irish appropriations of hip-hop music encompass what Lull refers to as "glocalization": when a global phenomenon or trend is appropriated by a local culture so that the item in question is recognized globally but also bears local distinctions (Lull, 2000). The biggest example of this is the McDonald's restaurant chain (Lull, 2000). McDonald's are found in nearly every market in the world, and while all of them share similarities, such as brand name, logos and a core menu, the restaurants in each region offer different menu items as well (ibid). Teriyaki burgers are available in Japan & Hong Kong, salmon sandwiches are available in Norway, and yogurt drinks are available in Turkey (ibid). In this way, McDonald's asserts itself as a global force with similarities across the globe, but at the same time it embraces aspects of the local culture and puts its own stamp on it. "While globalization is irreversible, the global has not destroyed or replaced the local. The very concept of culture presumes difference." (Lull, 2000: 234)

Glocalization

Glocalization is a cultural force that is stemming the tide of homogeneity. As Lull says, "The global circulation of images, ideologies, and cultural styles fuels symbolic creativity, lessens homogeneity, and increases cultural diversity." (Lull, 2000: 232) As trends and cultures

establish global reaches, such as hip-hop, glocalization ensures that new strands and hybridities are being formed. Glocalization works in favour of both the global trend and the local environment. New facets and distinctions are added to the global trend, such as different instruments being used or perspectives expressed, while the local culture now has one more additional method of expressing itself. As Lull states, "Culture has never been motionless; it is invariably reinvented by subsequent generations." (Lull, 2000: 261).

Therefore in Irish hip-hop "authenticity" refers to the character represented behind the lyrics as opposed to the music being made. Rap being predominantly a lyrical music that carries on the oral tradition of storytelling and toasting one of the key ingredients to differentiate Irish versions of hip-hop from other national varieties are the lyrical representations. And this automatically leads to one of the first conflicts with regard to rap and Irishness: rap music began as a way of boasting, for MCs to "best" one another lyrically and to establish their greatness through their abilities to rhyme. However, one trait of Irishness consistently raised throughout this study is the lack of boasting and strong sense of self-deprecation, particularly expressed through humour.

This section has discussed authenticity in music forms and the issue of incorporating local cultural norms into global standards. The next section will discuss expressing identity in music.

Chapter 5: Music & Identity

The expression of Irish identity through music is an old debate, stretching back more than 100 years of recorded dialogue on the issue. This section discusses the expression of national identity through music, especially in rock music and hip-hop.

There are two major issues: the first being musical identity, in which the identity is represented by certain music motifs and instrumentation. The second issue is identity represented through lyrical content. This can take the form of political stances on issues germane to the specific character as well as references to the local, slang and accent.

Defining Identity

Various theories of identity exist. Some theorists regard identity “as a social construct, a reflection of society” (Hogg et al., 1995: 256). Stryker and Burke maintain that “identity refers to the culture of a people, including their ethnicity, and that parts of the self are composed of the meanings that persons attach to the multiple roles they typically play in highly differentiated contemporary societies” (Stryker et al., 2000: 284). In defining these terms further, culture includes such classifications as language, accent, religion, shared geography, shared reactions to the world and shared experiences as a people. Ethnicity encompasses language, accent, skin colour and other physical characteristics.

Therefore, representing one’s identity through music ultimately becomes a construct of its own, based on criteria of culture and ethnicity. Below I discuss various issues directly related to expressing one’s cultural identity through music.

Racial/Ethnic Classifications of Music

Tagg states that music cannot be classified strictly along racial lines since these distinctions rarely carry any meaning. European music based in the classical tradition with a strong emphasis on harmony is typically referred to as “white” music, and African music with a strong emphasis on rhythm and drumming is referred to as “black” music (Tagg, 1989). However, as Tagg points out these labels are meaningless since both types of music often contain qualities of each; so-called black music that is heavy on rhythm often has elements of harmony, and so-called white music that focuses on harmony often contains various elements

of rhythm (Tagg, 1990). Typically these terms are simply used as a way to propagate racial stereotypes of the superiority of European music over African music (Tagg, 1989). Most African cultures do not designate specific authorship over different rhythms; these drumming patterns are part of the collective and have communal authorship (Tagg, 1989). Therefore, the European system of designating specific authorship is deemed to give the music superiority over African musics, thereby establishing the superiority of “white” musics over “black”. This in turn continues the “othering” of African music styles (Tagg, 1989).

Hybridity

Traditional Irish music, or trad, is currently the most recognizable form of Irish musical expression. Trad is acoustic folk music typically played on guitars, banjos, fiddles, and mandolins, and stems from a tradition that is hundreds of years old. As British rule forced the linguistic migration of the Irish people from the Irish language to English, current day trad music is largely performed in English and tells stories dating back hundreds of years. Therefore the hybridity of Irish rock music refers to the hybridizing of trad and rock music (McLaughlin et al., 2000), a form that has been highly successful for Irish musicians as they have been finding success at the international level for more than 40 years (McC Campbell, et al., 2005). Most musical hybrids of Irish music refer to the use of trad hybridized with another musical form.

As the main source of Irish musical identity, trad hybridized with rock has been the most consistent form of Irish expression, whether it is in the blues and jazz influenced music of Van Morrison, the heavily-folk and mythology inflected grooves of so-called Celtic rockers Horslips, or even appearing in the punk music of The Pogues (McLaughlin, et al., 2000).

Irishness

Irish identity expressed through a national music is the subject of a paper from 1890, “Notes on Irish Music,” submitted by F. St. John Lacy during the Proceedings of the Musical Association (Lacy, 1890). St. John Lacy puts great value in music expressing a national character, stating that “Show me a nation’s music and I will tell you the character of its people” (St. John Lacy, 1890: 171). Although issues of colonialism are not addressed, St. John Lacy notes that music is the primary form of cultural expression for a people (St. John

Lacy, 1890). “It is in their music that their real selves stand revealed, and it is in music that their inmost thoughts and feelings are expressed” (St. John Lacy, 1890: 171).

Although the Irish have been essentialised as being a musical people (Campbell & Smyth, 2005), there have been written historical records documenting their musicality as far back as the 12th C. and throughout the ages up to modern times (St. John Lacy, 1890). While there were various instruments used by bards, the harp, which is also the Irish national symbol, was considered the best instrument for Irish expressiveness (St. John Lacy, 1890). There are drawbacks, though, in closely aligning one’s music with their national identity. Such a move often leaves the artist with a narrow definition of their music that further limits “their range of music and performance possibilities by closing off options and alternatives” (McLaughlin, 2000: 192).

Musical Identity vs. Lyrical Identity

Condry states that while some Japanese hip-hop carries musical statements that are imbued with traditional instruments, this is a minority practice (Condry, 2006). The majority of identity expression takes place via the lyrics and the imagery of the artist (ibid). In a sense, the music is universal (Hosokawa, 2002). Japanese DJs squarely put the burden of qualifying the Japanese-ness of the overall music onto the MCs as the musical production does not necessarily represent the national character or society (Hosokawa, 2002).

Like the Japanese, the expression of Irishness in Irish hip-hop rests on the MC and not the DJ. In terms of musical hybridities, fusing trad and hip-hop is rarely done, if ever. One of the few examples of trad instrumentations and motifs used in hip-hop were employed by the pioneering Irish rap outfit Scary Eire. Their album “The Scary Era” demonstrates a couple of songs that utilize samples of flute. The Gudmen, a more recent rap outfit, followed this lead in some of their earlier tracks as well.

What defines the majority of Irish hip-hop as Irish is the use of slang, local references, and accent. Other major signifiers also take subtler forms such as the Irish self-deprecating sense of humour and sense of wit. In some ways, these last two signifiers correspond to issues of authenticity discussed earlier. The most important rule is that the use of slang not be forced.

To force the use of slang or to use it outside of context is to sacrifice the authenticity of the slang and therefore the track itself.

U2 is one of the most famous rock bands Ireland has produced. Cogan maintains that while the band clearly plays in a universal rock style, U2 also represents Irishness in their music (Cogan, 2006). The band has "constructed an identity that resembles no other, an identity in which 'Irishness' isn't a mere word but represents the past and also the present, and the future" (Cogan, 2006: 46). According to Bono, the notion of re-inventing Irishness came from America; America is land of re-invention, and the Irish traditionally and historically have re-invented themselves in America (Cogan, 2006: 42). Although the "definitions of 'Irishness' vary greatly", Cogan says, "'Irishness' means freedom" (Cogan, 2006: 46). The Irish cultural heritage "has a very strong tradition of storytelling especially as the Irish are known for the gift of the gab and for writing" (Cogan, 2006: 48). Ultimately though, "Irishness is a state of mind" (ibid). As Cogan states: " 'Irishness' is therefore not only about words, attitudes and places but also about an atmosphere that is quite difficult to put into words or to explain. Irish legends are a potent reminder of the origins, even though we all know that they are legends" (Cogan, 2006: 59).

Often what connects a musician with nationality or projecting national identity through the music is simply the locality of the music's creation; this can be accomplished without the music necessarily being influenced by the local musical styles or motifs (Stokes, 1994). "Musical styles can be made emblematic of national identities in complex and often contradictory ways" (Stokes, 1994: 13). Many rappers interviewed for this study termed themselves as 'Irish rappers' and their music as 'Irish hip-hop' based solely on the criteria that the music was being made in Ireland and addressed experiences of living in Ireland despite the fact that many of these individuals were originally from Africa or other parts of Europe. Stokes also cites the example of the classical Polish composer Frederic Chopin, whose music was appropriated by the "Polish intelligentsia as a symbol of nationalism despite the fact that Chopin was an international composer with very little experience of Polish peasant music" (Stokes, 1994: 13). Cogan also states that "U2 has made some of its most 'un-Irish' music in

Ireland” (Cogan, 2006: 59); therefore the opposite can be inferred, that possibly the band’s more Irish music has been made outside of the Emerald Island.

In addition to musical heritage, the Irish heritage also has a background in the lyrical or oral tradition. Irish bards, more commonly referred to as *filidh*, were employed by kings and chiefs in Irish society to maintain the oral tradition and to compose poems and prose, occasionally in praise of these kings and chiefs (Howie, 2007). Prior to the dominant position Christianity gained in the society of Ireland before the Norman invasion, the Celts were largely an oral society (ibid). News was carried from town to town by bards and *filidh*, usually hidden in long poems and verse (The Bard’s Rest, 2007).

The power of the spoken word was considered magical, so much so that writing was said to remove this power (Howie, 2007). The spoken word had so much power that a falsehood or untruth was thought to be able to change the very fabric of reality (ibid). The *filidh*, therefore, had a high status in Celtic society (The Bard’s Rest, 2007). It was said that their power for rhyme and wit was strong enough to rhyme a man to death (ibid).

Rap has long been recognized for its position in maintaining the oral tradition. In addition to the stories told in rap lyrics, a main facet of rap is the diss and MC battles, in which MCs improvise rhymes extolling their own verbal prowess while insulting their opponent. The diss and MC battles have their roots in specific facets of orality, namely verbal duels. Turkish society has a long-standing tradition of verbal duels among young boys, predominantly ages 8 to 14 (Dundes et al., 1972). These duels follow certain rules and understandings, and not only are used to determine one’s social dominance but specifically focus on an individual’s sexuality and manhood expressed through sexuality (Dundes et al., 1972). The duels utilize specific rhymes and follow specific patterns; specific rhymes are met with specific answers (Dundes et al., 1972). The ability to match the challenges with the specific, rhyming retorts is the key to being determined the victor (Dundes et al., 1972).

Walter Ong notes the distinctions between written and oral cultures. There is a tendency to put a higher value in written cultures and writing despite the fact that orality has existed longer

than writing. The two represent different functions of language and culture rather than an improvement of one over the other.

Like the Celts who presumed magic and power in the spoken word, oral people and cultures relate to words differently than literary people (Ong, 1982), mostly because “writing is an imperialist activity” (Ong, 1982: 12). “Oral cultures produce powerful and beautiful verbal performances of high artistic and human worth, which are no longer even possible once writing has taken possession of the psyche.”

This chapter has discussed the representation of ethnicity in music, as well as the Irish tradition of orality and those links to hip-hop. The next section discusses the Dublin hip-hop scene.

Chapter 6: Hip-Hop in Dublin: An Overview

Hip-hop in Dublin has a very underground presence at the moment. Despite a few hip-hop nights at select clubs, there are no hip-hop clubs per se. Therefore the physical space that it occupies is minimal. There are occasional hip-hop nights where hip-hop music is played by DJs and local acts perform, but those are sporadic, usually one night per month per promoter and venue. But with hip-hop acts in these spaces there are no decorations or physical signifiers that allocate the space as “belonging” to hip-hop. For example, I attended two shows at The Crawdaddy, a large club with various different performance rooms. Both shows were held in the same smaller room within 12 days apart. The only decorations on the walls during both shows were posters of upcoming gigs. The poster for the first show was on display during this gig, but the poster for the second show, 12 days ahead, was not. Also, other posters of upcoming shows of other genres of music were displayed prominently along the walls, some of which have no connection to hip-hop. For example, a bluegrass act from the U.S. was advertised.

Bounce is a weekly hip-hop club night featuring DJs spinning hip-hop records for a club crowd. Due to its popularity, Bounce has just increased from a monthly night at the White Horse pub, a small pub on the quays with a capacity of 350, to a weekly night at the Vaults, one of the largest clubs in the country with a capacity of 1,200. In addition to DJs spinning dance music, there are live performances once a month by local Irish MCs. There is nothing in terms of decorations, posters, etc., to signify and claim the physical space for hip-hop. The audience that attends is typically a basic club audience, young people looking for a good time, dancing and a bit of drink. Most people wear basic club attire; most of the women wear clothing that sexualizes them, and the men’s clothing ranges from jeans and t-shirts to more formal attire that is still suited for clubs. The audience that attends typically knows the hits that are played, but also pay attention to the MCs during their performances. The performances I witnessed usually received a strong crowd reaction, and few people vacated the club either to leave or go outside and smoke. The crowd demographics are generally fifty-fifty with regard to both ethnicity and gender. Bounce’s target audience is a mainstream club crowd, said Tom O’Connor, the show’s promoter.

D'Live Vibe is a monthly hip-hop show held in city centre that offers a showcase of international rappers, most of whom are African. Attendance at the shows is slightly more than half in terms of ethnicity with more Africans present than Europeans; gender is about fifty-fifty. The majority of the performers are African, but nearly all of the acts rap in English, with the exception of a French hip-hop duo.

Hip-hop's low profile also continues in some of the major record stores in Dublin. On Grafton St., one of the main shopping areas in Dublin and arguably all of Ireland, two major record retailers, HMV and Tower Records, have retail space with large selections of various music genres: HMV offers 3 floors of shopping space and Tower offers 2 floors. But hip-hop is relegated to relatively small spaces within both stores; Tower offers approximately 3 bins worth of space and HMV offers roughly 4. And both stores locate hip-hop to areas that are out of the way; customers have to search for hip-hop records to find them. HMV's hip-hop section is in its basement and Tower's section is in the back on the ground floor, separate from the mainstream music. Another nearby music shop, Celtic Note, offers a tiny selection of hip-hop CDs, usually just chart hits.

There are a handful of specialty stores in Dublin's city centre that do cater to hip-hop, one of which is All-City Records. The term hip-hop technically refers to hip-hop culture which encompasses MC-ing, DJ-ing, graffiti and break-dancing. All-City sells spray paint and music, catering to both graffiti artists and music enthusiasts. Freebird Records operates space in Temple Bar catering to the hip-hop crowd. While there are a handful of other hip-hop record shops in the city they are very few and tend to cater to a select crowd. Most shops are in small in size and stature, and therefore maintain an underground presence.

The hip-hop crowd in Ireland as a community has a very strong online presence. The website irishhiphop.com is a major posting board that lists information on upcoming gigs, discussions on various topics, links for new tracks and videos, as well as other information. hiphop.ie is a newly launched site that combines information and forums on local Irish hip-hop artists with information on established mainstream American and British acts. [RapIreland.com](http://rapireland.com) provides a very limited online version of the small magazine of the same name.

This section has provided an overview of hip-hop in Dublin. I will now begin my discussion of hip-hop's relation to Irishness in the next section.

Chapter 7: The Link Between Rap Music and Irishness

The marriage between Irishness and rap music is not so outlandish when one compares the similarities, backgrounds and cultures between the Irish people and African-Americans. Both peoples share a common background of oppression of hundreds of years. Both peoples share similar socioeconomic backgrounds of poverty and disadvantage, and both cultures share a similar tradition of music, song and dance.

One of the major explanations for Irish appropriations of hip-hop are the socio-economic similarities between African-Americans and pre-Celtic Tiger Ireland, as well as the entrepreneurial spirit evident in the post-Tiger era. Before the technology growth that fuelled the economic boom from 1994-2001, commonly known as the Celtic Tiger, Ireland was a largely poor, agricultural country. Emigration was both a way of life and a fact of life in Ireland. As a country of outgoing migration, it was commonly accepted that one had to travel abroad to find work, particularly in more-skilled professions.

Kitwana notes that one of the main reasons hip-hop has been adopted by the white mainstream in the U.S. is that many whites are now in a lower socio-economic class than previously experienced, a fact which places them in similar circumstances to African-Americans (Kitwana, 2005). As whites' economic, education and job prospects have dimmed, the lyrics projected by blacks in these situations have taken on a deeper resonance (ibid).

When asked what he related to about hip-hop music, Dublin promoter Tom O'Connor stated that it was the lyrical content that drew him in.

"Back in the early 90s in Dublin times were a lot tougher than today, there was a lot of poverty. I grew up in Dublin on the North Side. I was born into tenement housing, government housing. I was an early school leaver as well. That determination to go out and get what you want I really got from hip-hop. I feel like it gave me a lot of ambition." (2007)

MC Battles and Irishness

P The Emcee notes that MC battles in hip-hop are a perfect tie-in with Irish culture. As he says, the

“typical Irish sense of humour is based on slagging or the piss-take. Irish humour and hip-hop can be associated together. The piss-take is like an MC battle. I liken them to an Irish sense of humour, taking the piss out of each other.” (2007)

MC battles combine toasting with asserting one’s lyrical prowess over their opponent. Many respondents felt that this was akin to the Irish wit as well as slagging.

I conducted 18 interviews and received more than 100 surveys from respondents. However, due to the quality of many of the surveys filled out and the qualitative nature of this study, I will be referring to them in general terms rather than from a position of statistical analysis.

Defining Irishness

Respondents and interview subjects defined Irishness in a myriad of ways, from accent to character traits to the Irish tradition of writing and storytelling. Messiah J, a local MC from Dublin, provided the following definition.

“The fact that I was born here is the only characteristic that qualifies me as Irish. I can never be disqualified as Irish. How Irish I am or am not is for others to decide as it is not something I think about.” (2007)

But not all respondents defined Irishness, their national character, as simply an issue of locality at birth. In fact, a number of non-Irish respondents from Australia, Africa and other parts of Europe identified with quantifiable Irish qualities despite not possessing Irish ethnicity.

Cool C is a scenester who has been into hip-hop for the last 23 years and has participated in all four aspects of the culture. He currently works at All-City Records in Temple Bar. As someone who grew up outside Kilkenny during the pre-Celtic Tiger years, Cool C ascribes Irishness to the cultural factors and experiences he went through as a youth: Catholic upbringing, a rural background, playing hurling, working on a farm, as well as traits such as friendliness and insecurity (2007). Noting the growth and change of the country as well as the cosmopolitan air that Dublin now possesses, Cool C states that

“Dublin is so unlike the rest of the country...very little about Dublin makes me feel Irish” (2007).

While a variety of answers were given by respondents and interview subjects for Irishness and Irish qualities, the most common characteristics were storytelling, sense of humor, wit, an appetite for drink, and being fun-loving, or “out for the craic”, as many put it. Again, many non-Irish in the study related their affinity for these qualities.

Urbanize, a promoter from Northern Ireland, and the only Northerner formally interviewed for this study, noted that it is important not to force the national identity.

“I think that there can be an overuse of Irishness in the music” (2007). We don't make hip-hop because we are Irish, it's that we make hip-hop and we are Irish. The music should suit the artists' individuality and express whatever we are feeling at that moment in time. We don't need to ram down the throats of our listeners that we are Irish every second” (2007).

Urbanize's views link directly back to the correlation of Irishness with blackness: that Irishness can be an overblown caricature of exaggerated traits, much the way Hall describes the exaggerated traits of blacks (Hall, 1997).

Scary Eire, Accents, & Slang

While not the first rappers from Ireland, Scary Eire was the first Irish rap crew signed to a major label. The band projected a strong Irish identity in many different ways. To begin with, the band's name is a combination of English and Irish, or Gaeilge, words, as “Eire” is the Gaeilge word for Irish. Therefore, the combination of English and Irish language in the band's name is a reflection of both languages in current Irish society. Secondly, the group's lead MC, Ri'-Ra', takes his MC name from the Gaeilge language word for bedlam (Wikipedia.org, ri'-ra'). Third, the group's music combined flavours of Irish trad music, such as Irish flutes, with hip-hop without creating a novelty sound. In a 1992 interview, Ri'-Ra' explains that the band's goal was to project its Irishness in the music (Kavanagh, 1992).

“We wanted to be ‘Irish’ from the start. Accents, influences, we talk about Ireland”
(Kavanagh, 1992: 8).

The band’s lyrics covered a broad range of topics germane to Irish society: drinking, life on the dole, going out with the boys for drinking and fighting, as well as political views on the situation in Northern Ireland (Kavanagh, 1992). The band also managed to insert Irish slang alongside obscure references to Irish culture into its lyrics, such as:

*Well they’re not too bad now, no it’s alright they’re grand
For awhile there, jaysus aw, things were getting out of hand
But don’t blame it on the band cause we’re banging things
When I do the dive man you’re raiser than your claddagh rings*
—“Rev It Up”, *The Scary Era*

Claddagh rings are also known as ‘the Irish wedding ring’, and are local only to Ireland. Their reference provides a strong Irish identity.

Irish society, historically speaking, has not been divided along lines of ethnicity due to the homogenous nature of the culture. Although this is changing due to the influx of immigrants from all areas of the globe, Irish culture traditionally has been divided along class lines, with the main signifier being accent. There are many different accents throughout Ireland based on geography. There are also many different variations of the Dublin accent, all of which are signified by class. These distinctions, therefore, are found throughout Irish hip-hop. Messiah J of the duo Messiah J and The Expert raps in a rather neutral accent and uses a minimal amount of slang on their latest full album, *Now This I Have To Hear*. Redzer, Terawrizt and all 3 MCs from DisFunktional hail from the northside working class suburb of Coolock; all rappers exhibit distinct northsider Dublin accents on their albums and Internet tracks. P The Emcee and Ay Cee of the Gudmen both rap in Kildare accents, while Maverick Sabre, who was born in England but has spent most of his life in County Wexford, raps in a British accent.

Nearly all survey respondents and interview subjects noted that rapping in an Irish accent establishes an Irish identity or provides Irishness to the music while also distinguishing

themselves from their American counterparts. Accent is the key method of establishing Irishness, respondents generally said.

DJ Lee and Ay Cee of the Gudmen both maintain that rapping in an Irish accent is one of the first challenges of an Irish MC. According to DJ Lee

“It’s hard not to rap in an American accent when you’ve been listening to it your whole life, but you have to try. You have to bring your own slant on it.” (2007).

Ay Cee says the identity is important and should be present in the music and the vocal delivery.

“[If] you’re Irish, I wanna hear your accent. [If] you’re from London, I wanna hear you’re from there. Talk about what you know. It is about keeping it real” (2007).

To what degree one displays their Irishness is a personal matter, most artists say. Messiah J, who speaks with a distinct Dublin accent but raps in a fairly neutral accent, says that

“I would never force Irishness or become a caricature. Sounding Irish comes naturally as it is the country I was raised in and I have been surrounded by Irish people all my life. Irish slang does crop up all the time in my work” (2007).

Slang and local references are the other keys that establish identity. One rapper remarked that Americans might talk about guns and drinking American liquor, but that Irish people would talk about sipping Bulmers.

Paul/Mic Check, one of the three MCs from DisFunktional, a rap crew from Coolock, calls himself Lucozade in the song “Walls of Coolock”, referring to the British energy drink.

“Well, I rock the energy they call me Lucozade” (DisFunktional, 2007)

This lyric automatically gives the song a local flavour and distinguishes it from American music. Although one can draw assumptions that Lucozade provides energy, the direct local flavour is what sets this track apart as an “Irish” lyric.

Some of the most popular slang uses are the phrases “deadly”, meaning cool or awesome, and “taking the piss”, which, as discussed earlier, is slang for slugging or giving someone a hard time, teasing or joking. These phrases are used often by Irish rappers and are easily identifiable within Irish vernacular. Most of the time the phrase is used in a straightforward manner. However, P the Emcee of the Gudmen provides one of the best demonstrations as to the flexibility of the phrase in the song “Keep it Rockin’” by the Gudmen.

“MCs wanna diss, please give it a miss/ We can take more piss than Michelle Smith”

This rhyme accomplishes multiple purposes and makes multiple references simultaneously. The first half references hip-hop culture, the need for MCs to diss one another and establish their authority over each other. Because of hip-hop's American roots, a reference to hip-hop culture ostensibly is a reference to American culture. Hip-hop references also reaffirm the track's musical authenticity.

The second half of the rhyme carries double significance for Irish culture. Use of this phrase connotes a certain amount of insider knowledge of Irish culture, and the reference to Michelle Smith is another distinctly Irish reference. Smith was an Irish swimmer who won three gold medals and one bronze medal at the 1996 Olympics in Atlanta, was accused by a competitor of using performance-enhancing drugs, and was later banned from the sport for tampering with a urine sample when she underwent routine drug testing (Wikipedia, 2007). Smith's Olympic win was a turning point for the whole country as it helped to establish Ireland's largest amount of medals won during a single Olympics. Therefore this line recognizes an aspect of Irish interactions as well as a major cultural occurrence for the country. The fact that Smith's Olympic wins occurred at the beginning of the Celtic Tiger economic boom, 1994-2001, only helped to swell the feelings of nationalism stirring at the time and helped to ensure her place in the culture. The lyrics also play on the figure of speech “taking the piss” as well as the literal physical act of urinating, or taking a piss. Plus, anyone who can “take the piss” is considered a force to be reckoned with. Another double entendre arises by the inference that just as Michelle Smith was considered bad for cheating, the Gudmen are also considered bad, but “bad” in slang terminology, meaning bad-ass or cool; again, a force to be reckoned with.

Respondents and interview subjects noted that rap offers an immediate opportunity to express one's self under any conditions. Other lyrical topics also take the route of basic self-expression in terms of failed romances, one's outlook in life, and other universal themes. *Art Immitatin' Life*, the debut album by Terawrizt, addresses a myriad of these themes (Terawrizt, 2007).

This section has discussed the lyrical themes Irish rappers and their use of accent and slang in the Dublin scene to establish Irish identity. The next section addresses MC names and symbols of nationalism.

Chapter 8: What's In A Name?

Symbols of Identity & Nationalism

All rappers use stage names which provide a major source of identity. Typically, the stage name replaces their given name in terms of recognition. For instance, Snoop Dogg is a household name throughout most of the Western world, even to non-rap fans, but very few people can identify him by his given name, Calvin Broadus. Therefore, the stage name often becomes the main identity of an MC or DJ, unlike actors and actresses who are known as a single persona and by a single name, irregardless of whether it is an adopted name or their given name. While a stage name can simply be a nickname it can also represent a major character trait or physical trait, such as Christopher Wallace's moniker of Biggie, which referred to his obesity.

Like most American MCs and DJs who either use a nickname or utilize a play on their given name, such as Marshall Mathers who is better known as Eminem or Andre Young who is better known as Dr. Dre, an overview of stage names of Irish MCs and DJs revealed the same trend. Their source of identity had a personal rather than nationalistic origination. For example, all three members of the Gudmen said that their stage names are derived from either their initials or an assimilation of their given name: Allan Clarke is known as Ay Cee; Peter Dunne is P the Emcee; and Shane Leigh is DJ Lee. When I asked Kieran Ryan how he developed the name Redzer, he smiled and pointed at his red hair. Diligenz, aka Karl Bradshaw, states in his profile page on Soundclick.com that he chose his stage name because it "means hard working, kinda, which is really the opposite of what I am!" (Diligenz Soundclick.com, 2007). Another example is Dermot Carney who is better known throughout the scene as DJ Carnage.

Nationalistic symbols have a low profile in the hip-hop music and scene in Ireland. From a list on Irishhiphop.com of 229 rappers, groups, and promoters registered on the Soundclick.com website whose profiles list Ireland and rap/hip-hop, only two artists represented symbols of Irish nationalism, Lil Sham and Lil Shamrock. Although Waterford-based rapper Rob Kelly utilizes nationalistic symbols to a large extent, he is an anomaly within the scene. The self-proclaimed "King of Ireland", Kelly's myspace.com profile page uses the tricolour motif quite well. The computer's mouse pointer reverts to a tri-colour flag, and the lines of text on the

page alternate between orange, white and green (Rob Kelly myspace.com, 2007). Kelly also has developed a logo of a silhouetted rapper utilizing the tri-colours. That logo is also visible on Kelly's personal website, <http://www.16bars.com/robkelly/main.html> (ibid, 2007). Green is the main colour on the website, and a map of Ireland is featured in the background (ibid, 2007). Also, two t-shirts are for sale on the site: one featuring the aforementioned tri-colour design, and a white shirt with green lettering on it (ibid, 2007). While neither mentions Ireland directly, the color schemes of both certainly are reminiscent of the national colours.

The minority of strong nationalistic identities in Irish hip-hop is nothing new; nationalistic identities throughout hip-hop have never really become a trend. No MCs or DJs with major success in the U.S. are represented through stage names of nationalistic symbolism. The other piece of consideration is that fliers advertising hip-hop shows I attended did not utilize any of the popular Irish symbols, such as the harp, shamrock, leprechauns or the tricolour. Nor are any such symbols or colour schemes used to any effect on irishhiphop.com, hiphop.ie or rapireland.com.

Condry has noted that some rappers in Japan use samurai imagery in their lyrics and album covers, particularly the katana or samurai sword (Condry, 2006). Japanese rappers will occasionally caution that they will use their "rhyme sword" on other MCs (Condry, 2006.). However, this trend and its equivalent are not seen in Irish rappers or in Irish culture. This could be so for several reasons: there are no symbols of Irish nationalism that translate well lyrically, and the images and symbols have little to no everyday meaning for average citizens. For example, while the harp is one of the national symbols and is located on the Irish version of the Euro, the question remains how prevalent the harp is to individuals.

Irish rappers, like most of their global counterparts, choose to identify themselves through symbols and nicknames that tend to have more personal value and individualism than through symbols of nationalism. While Irish rappers recognize their Irishness they do so in other ways, predominantly accent and local references in their lyrics.

This section has discussed the ways identity is represented through slang and accent. The next section gives an overview of gender in the Dublin scene.

Chapter 9: Gender and the Dublin Scene

How many brain cells have I got? Peroxide hasn't killed the lot

Cos hip-hop's a mans world, doesn't mean I can't give this a shot

Stand up have my say, so long they've had it their way

Using pretty females to get airplay – "Beauty 4 Gold", Tanya D

The Dublin hip-hop scene in many ways is largely the domain of men. While women are making in-roads in certain areas, men certainly dominate the scene. Attendance at most shows and mainstream club nights is roughly 50-50 male and female. But the disparity skyrockets once you go off the beaten path. The balance begins to slide to male majorities at the shows where more 'alternative', or some would say 'authentic', acts perform. And the gap widens to a chasm when one looks at the percentage of male MCs vis-à-vis female MCs. Of the 10 shows I attended featuring Irish rappers only 2 of these shows, a variety combo featuring local artists called D'Live Vibe, featured women artists. I only observed female performers the second time I attended the show, and only two of these were lead performers (not back up singers), and one of these women sang while the other rapped. Also, a young woman performed at the open mic night I attended at the Oh Snap! gig held at the Lower Deck. Neither of these performances were particularly captivating. Of the 18 interviews conducted for this study, only 2 were with women, and at least 4 other women were contacted and expressed interest but ultimately did not participate.

Men are truly in a position of power in the Dublin hip-hop scene, but women are making gains. One of the monthly shows, D'Live Vibe, that also happens to cater to a predominantly international and African crowd and features a male-heavy line-up of performs, is organized by two women. Overall, the number of male MCs far overshadows the number of female MCs throughout the scene. Olan, the owner of All-City Records in Temple Bar, noted that opportunities for men and women are not just about performance, but also about taking up music as a hobby itself. As he says:

"A dad might encourage his son to get into music, but not his daughter, and anyone loses the opportunity [if you don't] get into at a young age. The other end is [that the women] have as much a chance as anyone else, assuming they have same the

confidence. The equality of outcome only works when there's an equality of opportunity" (2007).

Tanya D, an aspiring MC from Dublin, has this to say about the lack of talented female MCs and DJs:

"Right now no female is up on the same level as Rob Kelly, [DJ] Flip, or Redzer. [The best Irish MCs and DJs] are all blokes. The heavyweights are all men. Whether girls just haven't been putting up the goods or they are still being taken as a novelty act [is unknown]." (2007)

Most of the men interviewed said that although there is currently a shortage of female artists in the scene women are welcome to join and perform. The majority stated that as more women participate in the scene from the performance side, the more others are likely to begin performing as well, all of which will be good for the scene as a whole.

Tanya also stated that due to the exclusionary feel of the scene, women who dare to venture in often do so alone without their girlfriends. Due to the sexualisation of women in Irish society and hip-hop culture, women face that additional barrier as they seek entry. As an attractive woman, Tanya noted that as she began attending gigs to watch local rappers perform she often went alone and therefore had to contend with the pressure of men attempting to pick her up.

The Irish hip-hop community overall has an enormous online presence. Here too, men dominate. Irishhip-hop.com is the predominant website providing information on all aspects of hip-hop in the Emerald Isle: info on upcoming gigs, audio tracks, video clips, and discussion forums. Interview subjects noted that not only are the posts on the site dominated by men due to their numbers in the community, but also because the content, as Tanya put it, borders on comments that are "inappropriate and sexist" (2007).

During my own observations, quite a few discussions, or 'threads', as they are commonly known, often had a strong tone of adolescent male posturings, either in their sexist approach

to women or through their braggadocio and challenges to each other. Though not all threads contain these types of themes, both exist to some degree throughout irishhip-hop.com.

“Re: Sex in the City night - This Saturday @ Bounce THE VAULTS

Posted by: [Seany](#) (---.b-ras1.cld.dublin.eircom.net)

Posting is addictive 320 Posts

Date: September 26, 2007 11:14PM

cant wait it'll b packed w/ sluts 😊 (irishhip-hopiphop.com, 2007)”

Of importance is the fact that few men complain or address the comments posted on irishhip-hop.com. Posts that sexualize women are rarely rebutted by other men.

According to Pure Tone, some women in the scene react to this sexualized attitude by adopting male posturing. One example is Sinistah from the crew Project 77 who acts

“thug and raps while holding her crotch, which really makes her look weird. I just think [most women] are trying too hard” (2007).

A view expressed by nearly all interview subjects is that women performers are not always taken as seriously as their male counterparts, that there is a tendency to view female MCs as a novelty act. But Tanya D says that this can be a good thing, that at least it provides the opportunity for a woman to play gigs, and that it offers a chance for other women to see a woman up on stage (2007). Although Maebh, the MC from the female hip-hop duo You're Only Massive, agreed that it is easier for women to get attention women also have to work “10 times harder” than men because of the lack of respect women receive in the industry (2007).

There is some contestation about female imagery from a lyrical standpoint in Irish hip-hop.

Pure Tone states that women in Irish hip-hop

“...are portrayed as sexual objects. A very few [rappers] have tried to respect women in our songs and stand up for them, but in the end what people want to hear is when we call them hoes and bitches, stories like in [Redzer's album] *Dublife* where ‘we nailed a girl in the back of a bus, truck or in the club, how they gave us the crabs’ and all that negative degrading stuff. Here the thing with Irish hip-hop is unless it's your

family they tend to just degrade women. Even Rob Kelly and Ri-Ra (from Scary Eire) do so too" (2007).

The issue of gender representation through lyrics in the Dublin scene is not easily defined. While some male MCs take a negative viewpoint, others take a positive position. Below are discussions of two different artists.

Case Study 1: Redzer, "In Control"

Verse:

*You're the only girl I've ever made a real connection with
But then I miss her up by saying 'you I know love you Lisa'
And you slap me in the face cause I forgot your name's Theresa
I can't face it cause without you girl you know I've nothing left
What I mean is I've a cock and it won't suck itself
No sorry what I mean is that I love you to death
I tell you that shit everyday only under me breath (coughs)*

Chorus:

*They think they're in control yeah but they don't know
Only bought that girl a rolls cause I got me hole with them
Think they're in control yeah but they don't know
We're only doin' what we're told so we get our hole with them*

The first matter is that the overall point of the song, which is delivered in the chorus, is addressed through Irish slang, 'get me hole', a phrase used by men to signify having sex. This reference localises the tune and represents Irishness in it. This track is interesting because of the conflicts it presents. On the one hand, the lyrics denigrate and sexualise women. On the other hand, however, both the lyrics and the delivery represent a major facet of Irish character: wit and sense of humour. This verse is delivered with a certain amount of tongue-in-cheek. Redzer generally displays a high degree of humour in his lyrics. At the beginning of the song Redzer says with a laugh, "girl power and all that shite."

There is also a conflict in that other songs on the *Dublife* album, from which this song was released, positively address a number of women's issues, such as abusive relationships, underaged sex, and teen pregnancies. At one of the shows I attended, Redzer clearly had a rapport and familiarity with some of the women at the show that seemed platonic, an indicator that there were friendships established and the possibility that this track does not reflect his true character or views of women in general.

Case Study 2: Messiah J and The Expert, "All the Other Girls"

Verse:

Whether it's circumstantial or something that the fates rig

Finding a great chick is like one almighty crate dig

So many styles, so many issues, start trolling

Somewhere in the bargain bin a rarer gem is calling

There! between the two worst 80s songs ever

Get out your pick axe and search thine,

Cause when you find it your heart will skip like a school girl

And it'll make all the warm wax seem worthwhile

(so worthwhile)

You'll be oiling up your shiny armoured suit again

(so worthwhile)

Power ballads will feel true again

Grown men, you turn to puppies when she phones ya

Buying love cards just to read the slogans

Chorus:

All the other girls were just keeping her throne warm

I drew closer to her every time a love died

I dug through the perfume (I dug low, dug high)

She waited 'round the corner as another love died

I dug through the promises (I dug far, dug wide)

Although this is certainly a hip-hop song in terms of musical content and lyrical delivery, the subject matter and tone of the lyrics is fairly anathema to most hip-hop material. Throughout this song, Messiah J proclaims his gratitude and love for his girlfriend while remarking on how difficult and rare it can be to find true love. His lyrics cover themes of romance and chivalry, especially when he says “you’ll be oiling up your shiny armoured suit again”. White Noise, a beat-boxer in the Dublin scene and a long-time friend of Messiah J, says that Messiah J puts women on pedestals in his lyrics, that “he feels they’re so much better than him” (2007).

These two songs represent the oppositional poles at which representations of women are presented in the Dublin scene.

Imagery

Some of the fliers promoting shows, such as Bounce, feature pictures of sexualised women, either in bikinis or in provocative poses. These portrayals also are presented on IrishHipHop.com, says Maebh, a factor which occasionally keeps other women from using the site (2007). It is necessary for women to confront these portrayals, as Tanya D states:

“As women we have a choice to stand up, and if we feel something different then we should express it. I’m aware that sex sells and women are beautiful creatures so it’s great for a woman to flaunt it. But we have more to offer than just that. Some people will enjoy what I’m saying in my words, some will say I’m too serious” (2007).

Tanya also states that some artists’ lyrics do not necessarily represent the person themselves, that at times artists act through an alter ego; that is there are views in their lyrics and music that are not in accordance with the person themselves.

Despite some of the hardships faced by women, those interviewed remarked that they have been welcomed into the community and supported by the men. “There are real good guys in this industry [in Dublin]. I’m getting good experience from the guys I’m connected with,” says Tanya D (2007). Both men and women remarked that what marks an MC ultimately is not their gender but their skill as an MC—their lyrics, flow, and stage presence. Their musical skills will further their musical careers, not their looks or presence as sexual entities.

Overall, the dominant identity being expressed through hip-hop in Dublin is of the male gender. This section has addressed the issue of gender in the music and the Dublin scene. The next section will address issues of ethnicity and the changing nature of Irish identity.

Chapter 10: Changing Identities, Ethnicity & Hip-Hop

Crowds

On July 29, D'Live Vibe, a live hip-hop variety performance show, was held at the Radio City nightclub in city centre. Kobi, a young African man who is one of the show's two hosts, addressed the crowd of 50 before the start of the show. As he welcomed the crowd he noted that most of the attendees hailed from various locales, predominantly Africa and Europe, as well as Ireland. "But we are all Irish," he said, before turning the mic over to the first performers.

Kobi's sentiments, that everyone at the show is Irish regardless of their origins, frames an interesting dilemma in post-Celtic Tiger Ireland. For more than a thousand years Irish society has largely been a homogenous one, and defining Irish society and identity has been relatively easy: white, Christian, English speaking. But in light of the economic boom of the last half of the 90s that has made Ireland a popular destination for immigrants from around the world, the face and fabric of Irish society has changed greatly. Answering the question, "Who is Irish?" is not as easy as it once was. As the definition of an Irishman changes, so does the contents of the music and the identities expressed therein.

Pure Tone is a rapper in the Dublin scene who performs at various shows, sometimes at D'Live Vibe, occasionally at Bounce, and other nights at shows he organizes on his own. Although he is originally from Zimbabwe, he says that "I consider myself Irish because I live in Ireland. I've got the citizenship, what more do I need? If it's there on paper, what else is there? Legally I'm an Irish citizen."

Locality is the key to Pure Tone's argument as he offers his own definition of Irishness.

"If it's about what you see in Ireland, [regardless of] whether you're [of] African decent, that's Irishness. Every man has his opinion on Irish society. What's your opinion? I

don't care about you flow, your accent, where you were born. A guy from America with a little Irish blood can come here and be considered an Irish rapper.” (2007)

Pure Tone notes the example of American hip-hop artists The Fugees, who had a very big influence on hip-hop in American and the rest of the world, and are considered American hip-hop even though 2 of the 3 members were Haitian.

“People have got to get out of that frame of mind. If I rap in French, you gonna say that's not French hip-hop?” (2007)

Another rapper from D'Live Vibe crew said:

“I'll always rep Lagos, Nigeria because that's where I'm from. But then I rep Ireland 'cause that's where I live now.” According to this rapper, who lives in Carlow, the fact that he lives in Ireland and makes music qualifies him as an “Irish rapper”. (2007)

Many interviewed in the scene draw a distinction between home-grown Irish hip-hop and American-sounding hip-hop. One of the biggest traits that scenesters say qualifies a track as “American” is if they rap about themes and topics found in American music, such as guns. But as the “Americanization” of Ireland continues, these experiences are ending up in more and more “Irish” hip-hop. As the Carlow-based rapper said,

“I rap about my experiences here and things that interest me, [including] racism and discrimination.” (2007)

To further complicate matters, this rapper has listened to American hip-hop for roughly half his life. While he has never been to the U.S. he raps and speaks with an American accent. Having lived in Ireland for 4 years, he will apply for residency next year, and then eventually for citizenship after that.

A key tenet of hip-hop is to represent one's neighbourhood, where you are from. Or put another way, repping the local. The idea originated that even though rap began in the poorest areas of the Bronx and rappers were struggling through debilitating poverty that they could

still be proud of their origins. This is also tied into the notion of “keepin’ it real”, another major theme in hip-hop. Keepin’ it real refers to rapping about what you know and not being phony.

Therefore, this rapper is staying true to the basic tenets of hip-hop. But as racism and discrimination are introduced as common themes in Irish hip-hop, the nature of the music changes, and ultimately this will impact on the state of Irishness in the music. And it leads to other issues of globalisation. For many years, racism and discrimination in Ireland largely went unnoticed, or at the very least, unrepresented in music because of the small numbers of ethnic minorities in the country, and the even fewer numbers of them who were making music. But as ethnic minorities from all over the globe arrive in Ireland and take the opportunity to express themselves, the nature of Irish music is changing.

One of the criticisms levied at these rappers is that their music is an imitation of American hip-hop, partially due to the fact that African rappers in Dublin will address guns and adopt “thug” personas in their music, personas that the ethnically Irish do not always see as authentic. As Tom O’Connor said,

“An Irish rapper should...express himself through his music, and no one else. If he wants to copy or do anything like that, there's always a career as a fiction writer.”
(2007).

This section has detailed the changing nature of the Irish character in society overall and how that affects the music.

Ethnicity in the Dublin Scene

The Dublin scene is somewhat segregated with regard to ethnicity, although changes and developments are slowly happening. Although some of the shows I attended seemed dominated by one ethnicity over another, interview subjects noted that any divisions in the Dublin were drawn by music style, not ethnicity or nationality. Therefore the Dublin scene is divided by different musical styles that generally appeal to different ethnicities.

A strong division exists between “American” hip-hop and Irish hip-hop, one of the main qualifiers being that those who make American sounding music typically discuss guns, drugs

and the ghetto in their lyrics. While drugs and ghettos exist to a certain degree in Dublin and other parts of Ireland, guns are certainly rare, though they are slowly infiltrating the crime culture. The majority of the “American-sounding”, or commercial, music is made by African rappers, while the more underground or alternative hip-hop is produced by the ethnically Irish.

As Cain J, a rapper from the inner city of Dublin said:

“Caucasian Irish artists tend to be so underground it’s not funny. They wanna be so ‘grimy’ about their music that they’re not prepared to make a commercial song to put us up with the other countries. The blacks are eager to make songs about parties while the Whites just wanna talk about politics” (2007).

Olan from All-City Records noted that Ireland is still a segregated society, and that this is reflected in the music scene (2007). However, he praised the Bounce gigs for reaching across ethnic lines. DJ Wax, an African who is considered one of the top DJs in Ireland, is the house DJ for Bounce. Also, D’Live Vibe gigs are organized and run by two ethnically Irish women even though the gigs feature a majority of African performers. And the hosts for D’Live Vibe are a Russian young man and an African young man.

There are a variety of factors owing to the ethnic compositions of the gigs in Dublin, including the locations of the performances and the fact that performers tend to bring their own crowds unless the acts are very well established and that immigrant communities are fairly well-knit. But both scenes are reaching across the barriers to each other in order to be more inclusive and integrated.

Dublin Hip-Hop Crowds

Of the 12 shows I targeted to attend during the period of field research, 10 of these were gigs of Irish rappers; one of these was cancelled due to technical problems on the day of the show. The majority of the shows were attended by an authentic hip-hop crowd. Only one show, a rock gig in which the opening act was Kilkenny rapper Captain Moonlight, attracted a fairly non-hip-hop crowd. But again, this was due largely to the fact that there was only one hip-hop act on the bill.

The attendees at the other shows tended to be “authentic” hip-hop crowds, in their elements of dress and behaviour. However, although many respondents noted that hip-hop is a culture that currently encompasses fashion styles, clothing was an example of what Lull refers to “glocalization”: the appropriation of a global style incorporated with flavours of the local (Lull, 2000). One factor, as Redzer noted, is that Irish people tend not to wear baggy clothes (2007). Although hoody sweatshirts were popular at shows, this seemed to be more attributable to the fact that the hoody is a popular European style. Also, the European hoodies tend to be preppier than American hoodies. Platinum jewellery for men was occasionally worn. Elaborate handshakes typically exchanged between African-Americans were also very commonplace. Local rap shows was the only place and time I have ever observed Irish people greeting each other in such a manner.

During performances fans, as opposed to club-goers who just happened to be present during gigs, exhibited a certain knowledge of what was expected of them by the performers. A popular refrain from performers is for attendees to “get ‘em up”, referring to the practice of hip-hop concert-goers to raise their fists with one index finger extended, typically the right fist. (Such references are even found in recorded material, such as Messiah J and The Expert’s “When the Bull Gores the Matador” from *Now This I Have To Hear* (ibid, 2007). During many shows the crowd did this instinctively without being instructed by the MCs, and when MCs did incite fans to “get ‘em up”, there was no hesitation, thusly demonstrating the shared knowledge of what it meant to be a hip-hop fan. Dancing was also a facet of most of the gigs, although sometimes more at some gigs than others. Also, performers tended to get rapt attention from the fans when they took the stage or performance area; side conversations usually dropped to a minimum and the performers became the focus in the club.

Demonstrating a knowledge of how hip-hop fans are expected to act and also exhibiting interest in the performances establishes the Dublin hip-hop crowd as an authentic crowd.

Conclusion

This study has examined Irish expression through the burgeoning hip-hop scene in Dublin while also taking into account issues of globalisation and authenticity. Through my research and data findings, I concluded that Irish hip-hop is one of the most valid expressions of Irishness in today's current society. This is so for the following reasons. First, it provides a current look at Irish culture in the opening of the 21st Century. Secondly, the accessibility of hip-hop and the fact that it can be practiced with a minimum of musical instruction and minimum of financial investment allows for participation at all levels and members of society. This is in contrast to trad music which typically requires expensive instruments and years of music lessons, a financial burden that not all members of society can bear freely. The ease of involvement to participate in hip-hop, therefore, signifies that its practitioners span the cultural spectrum from all classes of society thereby representing a multitude of voices and world views.

Additionally, I found that as society adjusts to life in post-Celtic Tiger Ireland, the forces of globalisation are rapidly changing not only the face of society but also the arts it produces. As the definition of what it means to be Irish changes, this will affect the definition of Irish art; new issues in society that were largely previously unaddressed or not previously visible, such as racial discrimination, will surface and these issues will arise in the music also.

The hip-hop scene in Dublin (and across Ireland, especially in Cork) is flourishing; new artists want to get involved and those performing want their voices heard. But until major labels take an interest the scene risks collapsing upon itself if these artists cannot get their voices heard. Or worse, they are forced to leave Ireland to make a name for themselves elsewhere and they are unable to mentor up and coming artists. Such a reality means that not only does the scene risk collapsing upon itself but also that Irish artists may never be heard outside of Ireland and therefore not be able to contribute to the greater collective consciousness of hip-hop in the world at-large.

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Appendix I: Questionnaire

- 1) What do you like about hip-hop?
- 2) Do you consider yourself: a fan, a casual listener, or in between?
- 3) What qualities do you associate with Irishness or being Irish? Do you have those qualities ?
- 4) Are you Irish? If not, where are you from?
- 5) What is it about hip-hop that you relate to?
- 6) Who are your favorite top 3 rappers (recording artists)?
- 7) Do you go to gigs of Irish rappers? How often?
- 8) Do you think Irish hip-hop is authentic and not just a copy of American hip-hop? Why or why not?
- 9) Are there differences between Irish hip-hop and American hip-hop?
Please list them.

- 10) Why or why not should Irish rappers distinguish themselves from American rappers?
- 11) What makes an Irish rapper authentic?
- 12) What characteristics about yourself qualify you as Irish?
- 13) What Irish characteristics do you identify in Irish hip-hop?
- 14) Do you purposefully or consciously make specific reference to Irish culture or your own Irishness in your lyrics and in the musical production, ie, using Irish slang or referencing specific Irish cultural properties, or using trad instruments or trad musical motifs?

Question 4, "Are you Irish? If not, where are you from?", was added after it was discovered that non-Irish respondents could identify with Irish qualities. This was question was added to ensure that an adequate number of respondents were Irish.

Is it difficult to be a woman in hip-hop?

How are women portrayed in Irish hip-hop?

Do women get the same respect as men?

Do you write consciously from the point of view of a woman?

Do women get enough opportunities?

Are women taken as seriously as men are?

How divided (racially/nationalities) is the scene?

Is there much interchange between scenes/crowds/auds/performers, ie Afs stick with Afs, whites with whites, etc.?

Are there conscious efforts to reach out for the sake of the unity of the scene?

How are blacks/Afs portrayed in Irish HH?

Would a newcomer be encouraged/able to break into the other scene, ie should a newcomer African/black stick with same and vice versa, or can a newcomer Af/black break into the "white" scene/crowd?

Are the whites taken as seriously as the blacks and vice versa?

Are blacks/Afs/non-Irish considered part of Irish scene?

These questions were added to determine the place of gender and ethnicity in the Dublin hip-hop scene. These questions were included in interviews but were not expanded for either the online questionnaire or the questionnaire distributed at shows.

Appendix II: Interviews

15/6 Cool C Cormac

30/6 Redzer

1/7 Jo-Jo

5/7 White Noise

5/7 DJ Lee, The Gudmen

5/7 P the Emcee, The Gudmen

5/7 Ay Cee, The Gudmen

11/7 Tom O'Connor, promoter

15/7 Urbanize, promoter

16/7 Messiah J, Messiah J and The Expert

24/7 Pure Tone

26/7 Tanya D

27/7 Sean Harley, radio/club DJ

28/7 Terawrizt

3/8 Cain/Young J

7/8 Olan, scenester, owner of All-City Records

10/8 Maebh, You're Only Massive

Appendix III: Listing of Gigs Attended

1/6 open mic, Oh Snap! at The Lower Deck,

16/6 Xzibit at Temple Bar Music Center

22/6 Captain Moonlight at The Sugar Club

27/6 Talib Kweli at The Tripod

30/6 Redzer, Bounce at The White Horse

1/7 D'Live Vibe at Radio City

5/7 The Gudmen at Eamon Doran's,

13/7 The Elements, Maverick Sabre, Finnesse, Jee4ce at The Crawdaddy

25/7 Chain of Command, Maverick Sabre, Butcher Boy, Terawrizt, Redzer, at The Crawdaddy

28/7 Redzer, Project 77, Terawrizt, DisFunktional at The Vaults--cancelled last minute

28/7 MC battle and Pure Tone & Jo-Jo, Bounce at The White Horse

29/7 D'Live Vibe at Radio City (Thug Brothers, Key West, Bboy Misty, Pure Tone, Jone-z)